

Second meeting of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council (FPC)

Friday, October 7, 2011 9:30AM – 12:30 PM

Nuestras Raices, Holyoke

In attendance:

Commissioner John Auerbach

Frank Carlson

Jeff Cole

Representation Kimberly Ferguson

Helene Florio, from Senator Knapik's office

Helen Caulton-Harris

Commissioner Julia Kehoe

Representative Steve Kulick

Assistant to Deputy Commissioner Ed Kunce,

John Lee

Katie Millet

Mike Scuderi for Manny Costa

Commissioner Scott J. Soares

Acting FPC Chair Commissioner Soares welcomed everyone.

The minutes from the last meeting were approved.

Commissioner Kehoe introduced Diego Angarita who shared an overview of [Nuestras Raices](#). The organization's background, successes and challenges were described, including issues related to Hurricane Irene.

Old Business was discussed including confirmation from the Harvard School of Public Health regarding the cataloging of farm to school practices which will be presented at the November meeting. The Grocery Task Force has been invited to meet and share a presentation at the November meeting if it works with their schedules. There was no update available on the vacant position on the Council.

Commissioner Kehoe introduced DTA Assistant Commissioner Stephanie Brown who shared a presentation on The Massachusetts Health Incentives Pilot Program (HIP). Massachusetts is the only state in the country to have the HIP pilot program, focused on Hampden County. Instead of restricting food choices, people are rewarded for buying healthy food. HIP is tied in with the SNAP program. The presentation was followed by questions and answers. [View Presentation](#).

Commissioner Auerbach provided an update on the WIC program and the move towards the use of electronic cards for benefits, including the background that 38,000 people are WIC recipients, representing about 40% of the Massachusetts women who give birth each year. The MA Department of Public Health is well along in a 2-year EBT planning grant to move the efforts forward. Expectations are for a system to be in place in 2 – 3 years.

Commissioner Soares shared a draft matrix template, and requested that Food Policy Council members might fill it out prior to the November meeting, to be able to document programs in

relation to the Food Policy Council objectives and look for synergies, efficiencies and opportunities.

Commissioner Auerbach introduced Cheryl Bartlett who shared an update on the Department of Public Health's Community Transformation Grant totaling \$5 million in awards through a highly competitive process. There is a focus on childhood obesity, activity and foods that are served in school, vending machines in municipal buildings, and restaurants to facilitate good choices.

Commissioner Auerbach facilitated a discussion regarding the Food Policy Council and developing a plan of activities to address the objectives in the legislation. What should we do and where should we focus our attention? What can we do in the short term in terms of quick wins as well as long range goals? We want to show that having a Council can make a difference. We are gathering information. We looked at what other food councils are doing at the first meeting. At the next meeting we'll hear about successful farm to school programs, especially where there is a short growing season. Can we identify a few key priority issues: Are there policy changes that would make a difference? It could be regulatory, financial incentives or proposing state or federal legislation, as well as offering support. For example, legislation changed the rules for competitive products offered in schools through the a la cart program. Executive orders can require healthy foods to be part of the RFP process. There can also be recommendations for guidelines or policy for a variety of groups including best practices. What should our priorities be?

Jeff Cole: It's important to gather information but we also need to get something done. A focus might be farm to school.

Representative Ferguson: The farm to school is a win and could be expanded. Some municipal governments could use more information to understand how they can get on board.

Senator Kulik: Public outreach and education is very important since they are in a position to make demands about farm to school for example, supporting a bottom up effort to make those connections. Councils on aging and meal site programs may be candidates for healthier and more local foods.

Commissioner Auerbach: For us to understand the issue, we need to peel back the onion and understand the problem to know what is holding us back.

Helene Florio: Information to the legislative offices could be shared as talking points and through social media. We send out info frequently each day - people just need to know. People need to know what's going on in Peter Rabbit language.

Commissioner Auerbach: The devil is in the details, what's the pro, what's the con for example: Resolutions: Schools want to buy 25% local without knowing if it is reasonable which can be challenging.

Frank Carlson: We have a real jump on consumer awareness considering that that the movement for local products is great – we need to keep the bandwagon moving. In some cases demand exceeds supply which can have a good snowball effect to effect business for growers.

John Lee: From my experience in local government, creating squeaks at the bottom is important for getting things going at the top. We need to activate consumers to ratchet up the interest and increase pressure on school administrators to work with local farmers and local produce. There is a counter trend – MA has more farms but with decreasing acreage. This work should make it more feasible to hold onto the larger farms. It's important to aggregate smaller farmer's products with cooperative trucking for example. It's a problem for small farmers with diversified operations, but not impossible.

Commissioner Auerbach: What can this council do to build this grass roots effort?

Katie Millet: Farm to school model could be something for the FPC to look at and how it works from 50 – 200 schools (out of 370) could see the Council looking at the model and expanding on farm to elderly or farm to childcare – how could we expand knowing that we must deal with the issues of volume on the supply side.

John Lee: If you create the marketing, the volume will happen.

Kelly Erwin from the Massachusetts Farm to School program was in attendance and asked to share comments. She offered to make a presentation at a future meeting on what has worked as well as growing challenges including production capacity, aggregate models, and distribution. Her perspective is as a farm advocate, so working with hospitals and assisted living groups can follow a similar model.

Commissioner Soares: There may be a consensus for a program to jump into and it could be Farm to School. The HSPH review of best management practices at next meeting will be helpful.

Katie Millet: All presenters can keep in mind the four FPC mandates from the legislation.

Commissioner Auerbach: Each FPC members has some info but not the big picture, so don't spare any details and to build the knowledge of the council members.

Commissioner Soares: It's important to share the big picture as well as to identify constraints along the continuum.

Frank Carlson: I like the focus on the elderly and using the farm to school program as a foundation.

Commissioner Auerbach: We could invite the Secretary from Council of Elders to an upcoming meeting.

Jeff Cole: Noted that UMASS Extension needs to be strengthened to build grower technical support for these efforts. There is a need to catalog issues with extension for support for growers.

Diego Angarita suggested a grass roots effort with focus on mobilizing students to have more input into their food choices.

Tufts Health Plan has an intergenerational program with Council on Aging sharing info with kids, which has been funded for three years as part of community transformation grants. It may be a model that offers good examples.

Alex Risley Schroeder, Massachusetts Workforce Alliance was in attendance and offered that economic development shouldn't happen separately from workforce development. There can be a focus on strengthening local food systems to build advocacy from food supply, production and supply, which can lead to educational support for these training and job opportunities.

Commissioner Auerbach: This conversation will continue.

Christa Drew, Manager for the Massachusetts Food Policy Alliance provided an overview including the history, current status, and suggestions for working with the Council of the: Food Policy Council Alliance. [View Presentation.](#)

Commissioner Soares: Asking about the Alliance and membership. Christa explained that the Alliance is revisiting the issue of membership. Currently, the Alliance's work is driven by the paying members. It's difficult for a diverse group to endorse legislation but the Alliance is moving towards this.

Commissioner Soares noted that the legislation for the Food Policy Council allows for a chairman, but not a co-chairman. We can structure the bylaws to also include a Vice Chair and Secretary.

Representative Kulik said he was comfortable with the Commissioner Soares in the role of Chairman of the Council and moved that he serve in that position. The motion was seconded by Jeff Cole and unanimously passed.

Commissioner Soares opened a discussion on how to appoint an advisory committee for the Council.

Representative Kulik: The Advisory Committee provides an opportunity for more stakeholders to be involved. The advisory committee's role could be identified in the bylaws.

Before the next meeting there will be a draft set of bylaws for review.

A matrix will be distributed before the next meeting for members to fill in, describing projects and programs based on the FPC's legislative objectives.

The next meeting will be at Costa Fruit and Produce in Boston either November 4 or 18, based on Doodle responses.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:26 pm.